

Finding of No Significant Impact
for the Redevelopment of Arch Tank Pothole (#861)
in the Big Horn Mountains Wilderness
EA AZ020-2003-0082

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management, Phoenix Field Office, has analyzed a proposal by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) to redevelop an existing bighorn sheep water, Arch Tank, in the Big Horn Mountains Wilderness. The proposed action and alternatives and any potential mitigation measures are described in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA AZ020-2003-0082).

The original Arch Tank development was constructed in 1982, prior to wilderness designation. Arch Tank has not been maintained as a perennial water source because the population of bighorn sheep in this mountain range is small and because of the expense of hauling water to the pothole, by helicopter.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has determined that a future augmentation of this bighorn sheep population is needed to increase genetic diversity and re-establish them within historic range. To support this supplementation, a permanent, perennial, water source is required. The proposed action is to deepen the pothole, using explosives, construct a wilderness compatible shade cover and clean out and repair the existing gabion.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department and the Bureau of Land Management, Phoenix Field Office cooperate under a Master Memorandum of Understanding (1987).

Related Environmental Documents

- Arch Tank EA AZ-027-82-1
- Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan, 1983
- Lower Gila North Habitat Management Plan 1983.
- Master Memorandum of Understanding between the State of Arizona, Arizona Game and Fish Commission and the Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (1987)
- Wildlife Operations and Maintenance Plan for the Big Horn Mountains, Harquahala Mountains, Hummingbird Springs, Signal Mountain, Table Top, Tres Alamos, and Woolsey Peak Wilderness Areas EA AZ-026-92-53.
- Mountain Sheep Ecosystem Management Strategy in the 11 Western States and Alaska (BLM 1995)

Reasons for Finding No Significant Impact

- Both beneficial and adverse effects of the proposed action and alternatives have been considered, (see EA pages 4-17). Mitigation measures have been included to reduce or eliminate any potential adverse impacts. Therefore the beneficial effects outweigh any potential effects from implementing the proposed action.
- The proposed action is consistent with applicable the Land Use Plan and other environmental documentation.
- No impacts to paleontological, cultural or historic resources would occur from implementation of the proposed action.
- There are no endangered, threatened, proposed or candidate species in the vicinity of the proposed action. Implementation of the proposed action will not affect the desert

- tortoise, because there is no habitat in the immediate vicinity of the proposed action. Re-development activity is scheduled to occur during the period when tortoises are inactive.
- Wilderness values will be affected temporarily, during the construction phase. However, the long-term result will make the development more compatible with wilderness values.
 - The AGFD will provide contractors with experience in handling explosives to excavate the pothole. These same techniques have been used in other wilderness areas with beneficial results.
 - Public health and safety of the general public are not affected.
 - The actions are not precedent setting or unique. The BLM and AGFD have considerable experience with these types of projects and actions, and their effects are not uncertain. Therefore a unique or unknown risk is not being taken by implementing the proposed action. Similar projects have resulted in permanent, perennial water sources for wildlife.
 - This proposal is consistent with applicable state and federal laws, regulations, and policy (see EA page 4).
 - The Ea discloses the actions would provide a more perennial source of water for wildlife and a more wilderness compatible development by reducing the need for regular water supplementation by helicopter. It also discloses that the proposed action would result in a cumulative improvement in visual resources and wildlife habitat. There are no adverse cumulative impacts.
 - There is no substantial controversy over the effects of this proposal. No controversy or significant concerns were identified during public comment or agency reviews (See EA page 1, Public Comments Received from Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA) Inquiry) and therefore none were disclosed in the EA.

Determination

Based on the information contained in the attached Environmental Assessment, it is my determination that the proposed action is not a major Federal Action and will have no significant effect on the quality of the human environment, therefore, and Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Teresa A. Raml,
Field Manager

Date